March 3, 2004

TO: Members of the Representative Town Meeting

FROM: Sallie S.E.A. Raleigh, Chair, Board of Education

RE: **PROPOSED TOKENEKE SCHOOL FACILITIES PROJECT APPROVAL OF CHARGE OF RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE 2004 TOKENEKE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE**

On January 29, 2004, the Darien Board of Education voted unanimously to approve the Educational Specifications for a new Tokeneke School. The basic educational components of these specifications are comparable to those in all elementary schools in Darien. In order to ensure equity among the five schools, the educational program described in the 1994 Educational Specifications for the Five Elementary School Building Program was used as a guide. When the 1994 specifications did not include aspects of Darien's current program, such as reading specialists in all schools, space was added.

The Educational Specifications for a New Tokeneke School, The Administration's Feasibility Study Summary Report, The Fletcher –Thompson Feasibility Study, The Superintendent's Recommendation to Construct a New Tokeneke School, and The Charge of Responsibilities to the 2004 Tokeneke School Building Committee were forwarded to the Board of Selectmen on February 4, 2004. On February 23, 2004, the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to forward the Charge of Responsibilities to the 2004 Tokeneke School Building Committee to the RTM for its approval on March 15, 2004.

The charge is modeled on the RTM adopted charge given to the Darien High School Building Committee. Minor modifications have been made to reflect new state requirements. Included, therefore, is specific wording required by the State Department of Education's School Facilities Project Unit. The Charge encompasses the Resolutions required by the state in order to move forward with a building program. The Board of Education respectfully requests your approval of this charge.

## THE PROCESS GOING FORWARD

We would be happy to provide you with copies of any of the reports mentioned above should you need additional information. Our goal is to submit the Town of Darien's grant application to the State of Connecticut by June 30, 2005 so that the school will be completed by the fall of 2008.

As indicated by the timelines in The Administration's Feasibility Study Summary Report, the planning process must proceed expeditiously to meet this deadline. June 30th of each year is the deadline for all projects to be placed on the State's School Facilities Priority List to receive reimbursement. If the deadline is not met in 2005, the project will be

delayed for a year. In addition, there has been a recent change in the requirements for grant applications. Prior to the submission of the grant application, Darien, acting through the legislative body, must authorize total funding for the project. The Building Committee will come to the RTM for that authorization at a future time.

## BACKGROUND

Tokeneke School, located at 7 Old Farm Road in Darien was constructed in 1957. The school consists of a series of one-story buildings on a twelve-acre site. The buildings, comprising 47,627 square feet, are connected by walkways and breezeways.

Over the last five years, maintenance of Tokeneke School has progressively become more difficult and extensive because of its unique construction. Unlike most "bricks and mortar" New England schools, Tokeneke's construction is a mixture of wood and insulated metal panels. Rather than crawl spaces or a basement to house the mechanical distribution systems, these systems are located in below ground chases or buried, resulting in limited accessibility for repairs. Since the underground distribution systems are susceptible to freeze-thaw cycles, ground water and other conditions, they are more susceptible to deterioration. Direct access from the outside to each classroom makes daily maintenance more extensive and energy efficiency difficult to achieve. These limitations have resulted in a school facility with a shorter life span than our other schools because the infrastructure systems and construction materials are not as durable.

In the spring of 2002, the Darien Board of Education and Darien Board of Finance concluded that the proposed capital projects for Tokeneke School were extensive enough to warrant a comprehensive study of the school's maintenance needs. The architectural and engineering firm of Fletcher Thompson, Inc. was retained to analyze the extent of the upgrades needed with particular attention to infrastructure, code compliance, educational operation and security. In November of 2002, the architects presented their feasibility study and their conclusion that a major update was required. Four options, ranging from renovation of the existing facility to constructing a new one, were presented.

In the spring of 2003, the Administration presented additional clarifying information in The Tokeneke School Feasibility Summary Report. This report includes information about timelines and schedules, a capital projects approach, cost benefit analysis, the impact upon fields and facilities, alternatives to the original options, and the rationale, advantages and disadvantages for each option. In addition to presentations and discussions at numerous board meetings, two presentations were made at Tokeneke School and parents' views were elicited. As a result of this extensive analysis and discussion, the administration and the Board concluded that Tokeneke School does indeed require a major upgrade.

## CONCLUSIONS

Tokeneke School's aging infrastructure, combined with the educational and operational disadvantages of its campus-type structure, dictate a substantial investment in the facility.

Many of the facility's infrastructure components have reached, or will soon reach, the end of their useful lives. Repairs to the buildings are increasingly frequent and difficult. Direct access to rooms from the outside adds to the maintenance demands of the school, as does its wood and glass construction. The common room is limited because it must also function as a corridor. It has no air lock or vestibule, a limited stage area, and no separate space for cafeteria serving. The below grade gymnasium requires ongoing attention to prevent moisture problems. The original classrooms need improvement in lighting, windows, ventilation, and handicap access to bathrooms. Some of the classrooms have only 550 square feet of usable space rather than the usual 850 square feet. Conference space is limited. The campus layout makes security more difficult to achieve because the school has no single controlled access point.

**RECOMMENDATION**

After reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of the four options presented as well as several other permutations of these options, the Board concluded that the most viable options were:

- Renovation (Option A) of the existing facility at a cost of $5,844,756
- New Construction (Option C) at a cost of $17,331,568.

If Option A were selected, most of the educational and functional deficiencies of the existing facility would still exist. Option B called for demolishing most of the original classrooms, the gymnasium and the common room and replacement of these spaces with new construction. Additional new construction would be required to provide enclosed corridors. At a cost of $15,579,221, this option did not appear to be cost effective. Option C clearly resulted in a superior finished product that would probably have lower operating costs and a longer overall life expectancy.

After applying eight criteria to the options, the Administration recommended and the Board approved the construction of a new Tokeneke School. The reasons for recommending and approving Option C are as follows:

1. **Cost-benefit Analysis:** Although Option C will cost more than Option A over a twenty year bond period, the long term financial benefit of a new facility clearly outweighs the lower short term expenditure. In present value dollars, Option C will result in a savings of almost $9,000,000 over the next fifty years. This presumes that a new school will last longer than a renovated school.
2. **Educational and Operational Uses of the School:** A new facility would correct all the current limitations in the facility and make it much more conducive to effective delivery of the educational program and daily operations.
3. **Security:** A single access point can be achieved and overall access will be limited through the construction of interconnected classrooms and common spaces in a two-story facility.

4. **Maintenance and Energy Efficiency:** While a new facility will require less maintenance relative to major projects, repairs and daily maintenance, it will also enable greater efficiency of energy usage.
5. **Duration of Construction:** Under Option C, the length of construction would be two years versus the five years required for renovation. The adverse impact upon the delivery of education during construction would be greatly reduced.
6. **Longevity of the Facility:** A new facility would last approximately seventy-five years as opposed to the twenty-five year life span of a renovation.
7. **Field Space:** The added benefit of a two-story facility would be additional field space for the school and the community.
8. **Modernized Instructional Space:** A new facility would allow for proper instructional and operational spaces in all classrooms and common areas.

For these reasons, constructing a new Tokeneke School provides the greater educational benefit for students, parents, faculty and the community. The Board of Education looks forward to working closely with you, all other relevant Town entities, and the community to build an enduring facility that reflects this community's commitment to excellence in education.